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Father Stanley is a member of the Mariological Society of America, and has contributed to various Catholic publications. His longer study on the same topic as this reprint, *Mary and the Mystical Body*, was published as the Marian Library Study Number One in 1953.

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MARY'S ROLE IN THE MYSTICAL BODY

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Before beginning the study of Mary and her relationship with the Mystical Body of Christ, two outstanding difficulties must be faced. The first difficulty is that we are dealing with a **mystery**. And a mystery, while not contrary to our reason, is yet beyond our intellectual capacities in such a way that no matter how deeply we probe our subject there are always many questions still to be answered. This paper is not a complete treatment of Mary and the Mystical Body, but rather a survey of the more outstanding points involved in this relationship.

The second difficulty is the uniqueness and singularity of the persons and relationships to be treated. Our minds seem to be incapable of absorbing totally new facts. They need constantly to compare and relate new knowledge with that which is already acquired. Failing this they are completely lost. Their only refuge in such a case is **analogy**, a means of comparison by which we relate two ideas having one or two points of similarity, but otherwise different. The great danger in analogy, of course, is that we will forget that this similarity extends only to one or two likenesses and that we will go beyond these limits and make an absolute comparison.

As we proceed, therefore, bear in mind these two difficulties, namely, that we are dealing with a **mystery**, and that we are dealing with a **unique** mystery.

A. THE NATURE OF MARY'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE MYSTICAL BODY

St. Paul tells the Corinthians in one of his epistles, "The foundation which has been laid is the only one which anybody can lay; I mean Jesus Christ." (1) That is good advice at any time, but it is especially to be remembered when treating of the Blessed Mother; for she is so intimately associated with her Divine Son that she has no meaning whatever considered apart from Him. If then we are to arrive at a proper appreciation of Mary's place in the Mystical Body we must consider it in the light of that of her Son.

And what is the relation of Christ to His members? St. Thomas tells us that it is a threefold relation, namely those of order, of perfection, and of power. (2)

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In the relation of order, Christ is fittingly called the **Head** of mankind because he, considered as man, is closest of all beings to God by reason of the hypostatic union - the union of His divine and human natures in the Person of the Word of God. This incomprehensible juxtaposition of the divine and human natures constitutes Christ the new Adam, the Head of our race. For, while Adam holds first place among men **chronologically** by reason of his proximity to the creative hand of God, Christ holds first place among men **hierocratically** because of His union with the Godhead Itself.

In the order of perfection the figure of a Head again fittingly portrays Christ's relation to His members, for as in the head of a man we find the culmination of all his senses, both interior and exterior, so in Christ we find the full flower of every virtue, - "the fullness of grace and truth" (3) as St. John calls it.

And finally, the Head once more is an excellent symbol of Christ's relation to His members in the order of power. For it is in the head that the government of the body resides and from there that its movements are directed. And so it is with Christ. It is in Him that we have our supernatural life and from him that we receive direction and grace.

These three relationships flow directly from the threefold aspect under which theologians consider the grace of Christ. Just as a garden has different aspects depending upon the vantage point from which you view it - one view, for example, will best show its color scheme, another its orderly arrangement, another its cooling shade, etc. - so theologians, depending upon their viewpoint, see the grace of Christ either as a union, an excellence, or an influence.

The grace of union is the hypostatic union itself, the unimaginable privilege accorded Christ's human nature that it be joined with the divine in the unity of the person of the Son of God. And this grace, as we have explained, constitutes Christ the Head of mankind in the relationship of order.

The grace of excellence is the grace of Christ in so far as it sanctified Him according to His humanity. In this sense it is His fullness of grace - a fullness that is both extensive in that it includes all the kinds of graces accorded to men and intensive in that He possesses these graces in their fullest degree. And it is this grace that makes Christ the new Adam in the order of perfection.

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Finally, the grace of influence is the grace of Christ considered in its abundance - an abundance that becomes an overflow of divine life which deluges the hearts of men open to receive it. And it is under this aspect of His grace that we especially see Christ as Head of the Mystical Body. St. John puts it thus: "From His fullness we have all received." (4) Commenting on these words in His encyclical on the Mystical Body, Pius XII says:

These words of the disciple, whom Jesus loved, lead us to the last reason why Christ our Lord should be declared in a very particular way Head of His Mystical Body. In us the nerves reach from the Head to all parts of the Body and give them the power to feel and move; in like manner our Saviour communicates power to His Church so that the things of God are understood more clearly and more eagerly desired by the faithful. From Him shines into the Body of the Church whatever light illumines supernaturally the minds of those who believe; from Him every grace to make them holy as He is holy. (5)

Now let us examine the grace accorded Our Blessed Mother to see if it too can be regarded from these same aspects and if it too gives rise to certain relationships with the members of the Mystical Body similar to those of Christ. A bit of reflection will show us that her grace also has a triple aspect, being a grace that is singular, excellent, and influent.

Mary's grace is singular, for her fundamental privilege of the Divine Maternity places her in a special way within the hypostatic order and constitutes her transcendent over and separate from every other creature, or, as St. Thomas says: **propinquissima auctori gratiae.** (6) This unique role of Mary joins her with Christ in the headship of the Mystical Body, for just as Eve shares the headship of the human race with Adam and after him holds first place among men for **chronological** reasons, so Mary shares the headship of the new Adam and as the new Eve holds first place among men for **hierocratical** reasons, that is, on account of the singularity of her grace.

Secondly, Mary's grace excels all others except that of Christ so that it can be said of her that her **initial** grace, intensively speaking, exceeds the **final** grace of all angels and all men taken together, (7) and that, extensively speaking, her grace includes all the graces accorded to any saint and to all saints either under the same form, in a more eminent manner,

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or in an equivalent way. (8) This is what we mean when we quote the angel's greeting to Mary, "Hail, full of grace." (9) And St. Thomas comments, "Well do we say, 'full of grace' for what was parceled to others, was given to Mary in all its plenitude." (10) And this excellence of Mary's grace also constitutes her Head of the human race with Christ in the order of perfection - and for the same reason, namely, that it is in the head that we find the culmination of a man's perfections. But we must be careful to remember that Christ's fullness of grace is of Himself, whereas that of Mary is from Christ and because of Christ.

Finally, Mary's grace is influent. And, as with Christ, it is in this aspect that we best see Mary's role in the Mystical Body of Christ. St. Thomas tells us that "Christ alone had such a fulness of grace that it should overflow to men." (11) But in making such a statement he means that Christ alone had such a fullness **of Himself!** That he also admitted of a fullness in Mary which overflowed to all men is clear from a statement he made in a later writing, an explanation of the **Ave Maria**. Speaking of the distribution of grace to men he says, "It is a great privilege that any saint should be accorded grace sufficient for the salvation of many, but it is the greatest of privileges to have grace sufficient for the whole of mankind - and this privilege we find in Christ and **in the Blessed Virgin.**" (12)

Our recent Sovereign Pontiffs have been extraordinarily explicit in pointing out this role of Mary in the distribution of grace. Leo XIII in an encyclical on the Rosary quotes St. Bernadine of Siena as follows:

Every grace which is communicated to this world has a threefold progress. For, in accord with excellent order, it is dispensed from God to Christ, from Christ to the Virgin, and from the Virgin to us. (13)

Benedict XV stated in a letter to Cardinal Gasparri:

All the graces which the Author of all good desires to grant to the poor children of Adam are dispensed by the hands of the most holy Virgin. For such is the loving decree of Divine Providence. (14)

And Pius XII in a broadcast to Fatima is most explicit of all: he says during the course of it,

Having been associated with the King of Martyrs in the ineffable

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work of human Redemption, as Mother and co-operatrix, she remains forever associated with Him, with an almost unlimited power, in the distribution of the graces which flow from the Redemption. (15)

This privilege of Mary also is founded on her Divine Maternity, for in the words of St. Thomas; "in giving birth to Christ, Mary somehow diverted grace to all men." (16) Father William Joseph Chaminade in undertaking to explain that vague "somehow" of the Angelic Doctor has left us one of the deepest and most beautiful explanations of this role of Mary recorded for us. In a sermon on Mary as Mother he states:

At the same time Jesus Christ in the blessed womb of Mary received, in addition to His divinely glorious life, His human or theandric life, He received as well a life of influence over His mystical members. By means of it He is their Head and communicates His grace to them. In receiving this life of influence from Mary, He communicates it to her in return in order that she may become the Mother of Christians. (17)

In other words, Mary, in freely allowing Christ to take His human nature from her, made it possible for Him to become incarnate, to be head of the Mystical Body, to have a "life of influence" whereby His grace would flow into all His members. And in return, Christ made Mary to share in His Headship and to participate in His "life of influence" that is, in the distribution of graces.

We might point out in passing that while the fact of Mary's cooperation in the distribution of graces is almost universally acknowledged, (18) the precise way in which she does so is a question that is still disputed. It is agreed that she is at least the moral cause of grace, that is, by her intercession she obtains graces for all men, but it is undecided whether or not all graces are transmitted in a physical way through her, such as they are in the sacraments.

B. FIGURES ILLUSTRATING MARY'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST

We have already determined and examined the nature of Mary's role with regard to the Mystical Body of her Son - a role that St. Irenaeus, Father of the Church, and Rupertus, Abbot and great exegete of the twelfth century, do not hesitate to say constitutes Her Head of the Mystical Body with Christ, it being understood of course, that she is so in a second-

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ary and dependent manner. (19) But to constantly refer to her as Head of the Mystical Body always appending that qualifying statement is too clumsy a metaphor for popular or even for scientific usage. We need another figure - one that will adequately express her place with regard to the Mystical Body in the three relationships of order of perfection and of power.

A first figure, dating back to the ninth century, common in the Middle Ages, used by many saints, and even employed by Saint Pius X in his encyclical **Ad diem illum**, (20) is that of the **neck** of the Mystical Body. Its use has its advantages and disadvantages. It has the advantage, for example, of expressing well Mary's place of dependence on Christ and her office of mediation between us and Christ. But its disadvantages are far more numerous. The neck is an ugly organ and so fails entirely to express the beauty of Mary's role; it is an ignoble part of the body and so fails to show forth Mary's eminent and singular position; it is a simple canal between head and members and so in no way manifests the vital influence, the notion of causality by which Mary brings the supernatural life of grace to the members of the Mystical Body.

Another and very modern metaphor is that of the **heart**. (21) It is a figure first championed by the great German theologian Scheeben and has been found many advocates among modern theologians. This figure too expresses well Mary's dependence on Christ. Moreover, because of the nobility of the heart in the estimation of men, this symbol also manifests her eminence in an excellence manner. Its vital activity well illustrates her influent role in the Mystical Body; its indispensable role in metabolism makes clear the importance of Mary in the Divine plan; and, of course, the beauty of the figure is evident. It does have its disadvantages, however. It is for example, a modern confection of theologians, not a traditional usage among the simple faithful - a characteristic which in matters Mariological is an almost infallible indication of what is best and proper. And noble as the heart of men may be, its impersonal and mechanical role in the body makes it a weak figure of the very personal and maternal function of Mary with regard to the members of the Mystical Body.

To my mind the best of all figures is that of **mother**. This figure has the advantage of expressing in the fullest and most excellent manner all three of the relationships - those of order, of perfection, and of power - which constitute the substance of Mary's role in the Mystical Body. It is the Mother who holds first place after the Son, our Head; it is in the

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mother that we find summed up all the perfections found in her numerous spiritual offspring; it is the mother who gives us life and who never ceases to protect and foster that life by her maternal care. In addition, its beauty is unsurpassed, it is vital, it is personal, it is responsible. Most of all, it is the figure consecrated by tradition, by the Fathers and the Saints of the Church, by the constant usage of all the faithful of the Church through all ages. Finally, it is **the** figure, and the **only** figure, used by Pope Pius XII in his encyclical on the Mystical Body to express the role of Mary in this sublime mystery.

In the first part of this great document we read:

Our Saviour shares His most personal prerogatives with the Church in such a way that she may portray in her whole life, both exterior and interior, a most faithful image of Christ. (22)

Now if the Mystical Body is to be a faithful image of Christ we should rightfully expect that Mary will have the same relation to it as she had to Christ and that relation was that of a **mother**. And the Holy Father bears out his supposition, for in a concluding paragraph he expressly states that

she who corporally was the mother of Our Head, through the added title of pain and glory became spiritually the mother of all his members (23)

and that through the ages she has

continued to show for the Mystical Body of Christ, born from the pierced heart of the Saviour, the same mother's care and ardent love with which she clasped the Infant Jesus to her warm and nourishing breast. (24)

C. APOSTOLIC CONSEQUENCES

The key to the apostolic consequences of Mary's role in the Mystical Body is given to us by Pope Pius XII in the paragraph we have just quoted. If the Church, and more particularly the members of that Church, are to portray in their lives a most faithful image of Christ, their relation to Mary must not only be the same as Christ's relation to Mary, but the reason for that relation and the consequences of that relation must be present as well. And why did Christ make Mary His mother, why did He become her Son? It was because He wished to save souls. And if we are to reproduce that relationship in our lives it must be for the same

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reason - to save souls.

The consequences, then are evident. We must associate ourselves with Mary in this apostolic work just as Christ associated Mary with Himself in this work during His lifetime and still associates with Himself in its continuance throughout the ages, as Pius XII so beautifully attests. Being by our membership in the Mystical Body, other Christs, other sons of Mary we can never regard Mary solely as the means to our personal perfection, solely as a powerful intercessor on behalf of our personal needs. Rather we must regard her as Christ regarded her - as the Woman of Genesis (25) who was to battle Satan and crush his head, as the Woman of the Apocalypse (26) who will save her offspring from the clutches of the Dragon. We will then put ourselves at her disposal as her instruments and our primary concern will not be our own benefit, but her service.

FOOTNOTES

1. 1 Cor. 3, 11.
2. *Summa Theologica* III, q. 8, art. 1.
3. John 1, 14.
4. John 1, 16.
5. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* XXXV, pp. 215-216.
6. *Summa Theologica* III, q. 27, art. 5, ad 1.
7. Cf. Reginaldus Garrigou-Lagrange, O. P., *De Christe Salvatore* (Romae: Marietti, 1949), p. 210.
8. Cf. Gabriel M. Roschini, O. S. M., *Compendium Mariologiae* (Romae: Scientia Catholica, 1946), pp. 52 ff.
9. Luke 1, 28.
10. *Summa Theologica* III q. 27, art. 5, sed contra.
11. *Ibid.*, ad 1.
12. *Opusculum* 6, *Expositio super salutationem angelicam*.
13. *Acta Sanctae Sedis* XXVII, p. 179.
14. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* IX, 266.
15. *Ibid.* XXXVIII, p. 266.
16. *Summa Theologica* III, q. 27, art. 5, ad 1.
17. Quoted in Thomas A. Stanley, S. M. *The Mystical Body of Christ according to the Writings of Father William Joseph Chaminade* (Fribourg: St. Paul's Press, 1952), pp. 118-119.
18. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* XXXIV, p.44.
19. Cf. Tibertius Gallus, S. J. , *Interpretatio Mariologica Protoevangelii* (Romae: Libreria Orbis Catholicus, 1949) , pp. 14-17; 59-63; and 197-198.
20. *Acta Sanctae Sedis* XXXVI, pp. 454.
21. Cf. Cyril Vollert, S. J. , "The Place of Our Lady in the Mystical Body," *Marian Studies* III, pp. 188-193.
22. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* XXXV, p. 218.
23. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* XXXV, pp. 247-248.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 248.
25. Genesis 3, 15.
26. Apocalypse 12, 1-18.

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